

SOME FACTS ABOUT KIDS AND TOBACCO

Getting kids involved in sports not only boosts their level of physical activity and self-esteem, it also lessens the likelihood that they will use tobacco.^{1,2}

In recent years, it has become even more important to get kids involved in sports because schools have cut their physical education programs, kids watch more TV, and they have fewer opportunities to be active. As a result, kids are less active today and rates of childhood obesity have increased dramatically nationwide.³⁻⁶

Convincing kids to say “no” to tobacco and “yes” to sports and physical activity is a significant public health challenge. The tobacco industry spends billions of dollars each year to market the use of tobacco products, and often they use sports in their campaigns.⁷ We need new and more effective strategies to counter tobacco advertising in sports and to promote tobacco-free sports and athletes.

The first step is for more sports organizations, athletes, and coaches to choose health over tobacco by associating themselves with sponsors and products that promote healthy behaviors. We should also keep our sporting events tobacco-free. And most importantly, we should set a good example for kids by leading a healthy lifestyle.

To replace smokers who die, the tobacco industry targets new smokers—many of them teenagers.⁷ Every day in the United States, more than 3,000 young people become daily smokers. That’s more than 1 million new smokers each year in this country alone.⁸ More than 80% of youth who are current smokers think they could quit if they wanted to, but in reality,

only 3% of the 20 million people who try to quit smoking each year have long-term success.⁸⁻¹³

Some kids mistakenly think that other forms of tobacco—such as chew/spit tobacco, cigars, bidis, or kreteks—are safer than cigarettes. They’re dead wrong. These tobacco products can lead to many painful, disfiguring, and fatal diseases.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

Many teenagers feel immune to the dangers of tobacco use, especially long-term health consequences such as heart disease, chronic lung disease, and cancer.⁷ Young people tend to be unaware of the more immediate effects of using tobacco, such as reduced athletic performance and endurance, impaired lung function and growth, and elevated heart rates. Youth smoking is also associated with getting into fights, having unprotected sex, drinking, and using other drugs.^{7,18,19}

Secondhand Smoke Kills!

Kids who don’t even use tobacco are in danger when they’re exposed to secondhand smoke. Inhaling smoke from other people’s cigarettes, cigars, pipes, bidis, or kreteks can be deadly. Each year, about 3,000 adults who don’t smoke die of lung cancer as a result of breathing in secondhand smoke.²⁰ Secondhand smoke also causes lower respiratory tract infections in toddlers²¹ and triggers asthma attacks in children and adults.¹³



Teens who do not participate in sports are far more likely to smoke than their physically active peers.

Sports Participation Reduces Teen Smoking!

Scientific evidence shows that teenagers who participate in sports are far less likely to smoke than their peers who aren't involved in sports.^{1,2} In a study conducted by researchers with the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, high school students who participated in at least one sport were found to be 40% less likely to be regular smokers and 50% less likely to be heavy smokers than students not involved in sports.² The CDC researchers suspect that lower rates of smoking among student athletes could be related to several factors:²

- A boost in self-confidence because of their involvement with sports.
- Additional counseling about smoking from their coaches.
- Less peer pressure to smoke.
- Realization that smoking would hurt their sports performance.
- Awareness of how smoking would harm their health.

In the 1999 National Youth Tobacco Survey, one in three middle and high school students who had never smoked reported that someone else in their home smoked. Among high school students who had never smoked, over half reported being in the same room with someone who was smoking, and over 30% reported being in a car with someone who was smoking 7 days before the survey.¹³

Factors That Increase a Kid's Risk for Using Tobacco

By understanding the factors that place youth at risk for using tobacco, we can develop more effective tactics for discouraging them from ever trying tobacco products. Here are some of the known risk factors for smoking among teenagers:^{7,22,23}

- Having friends who smoke.
- Having parents or an older sibling who smoke.
- Having parents who are not involved in their lives.
- Believing that tobacco use is normal.
- Believing that tobacco use somehow benefits them.
- Having easy access to tobacco products.
- Being exposed to cigarette ads and promotions.
- Having a low self-image.
- Being unable to refuse offers to use tobacco.
- Coming from a family with low-socioeconomic status.